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AUTHOR Aist, Eugene H.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effects of a mandatory participation requirement on participant attitude toward and subsequent progress in a professional development program. Eight of the 24 schools in the Arkansas postsecondary vocational-technical school system were selected for the study. Participation in a professional development program was mandatory for those instructors hired after program implementation. Those hired prior to implementation were exempt from the mandatory participation requirement but were encouraged to participate voluntarily. An attractive incentive program for participation applied to both groups. Instructors and administrators completed a 48-statement instrument based on a 5-point response scale. Survey return rate was 100 percent. Progress was defined as the number of self-instructional Performance-Based Teacher Education curriculum modules an instructor had completed (out of a total of some 125). Data indicated that administrator attitude toward the program had no effect on or, in fact, had a negative influence upon instructor attitude. Regardless of the means used to ensure participation, instructor attitude toward the program had a high degree of effect on that instructor's progress within the program. No significant difference existed between attitudes expressed by or the progress of instructors whose participation was mandated and those who participated voluntarily. (YLB)

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THE EFFECTS OF A MANDATORY PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT ON PARTICIPANTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

A Paper Presented by

Eugene H. Aist, Ed.D.

at the

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(NOTE: The research upon which this paper is based was conducted jointly by Eugene H. Aist, Ed.D, Associate Professor of Vocational Education, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, Arkansas and Miles W. Collier, Ed.S., Assistant Director, Delta Vocational-Technical School, Marked Tree, Arkansas)

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THE EFFECTS OF A MANDATORY PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT ON PARTICIPANT ATTITUDE TOWARD A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Unquestionably, participation rate is a factor which critically impacts upon the success of any effort aimed at enhancing faculty effectiveness. If those for whom faculty development activities are intended do not participate, those activities, as well designed and intended as they may be, are meaningless. Low participation rates in faculty improvement programs, is a perennial problem whose solution has become inherent with the program's very design.

Participation in faculty development programs can be said to result from at least two identifiable, but divergent logistical approaches: through a voluntary choice made by the participant, or simply as a result of a mandatory participation requirement imposed upon the participant by the powers that be. Neither approach has been found to be without flaw. Likewise both have merits oftentimes staunchly acclaimed by their proponents.

Voluntary Participation

The ability to exercise one's own freedom of choice is certainly congruent with the democratic American way. And, participation in faculty development activities based on a voluntary motive is undoubtedly a preferred choice. But much to the chagrin of many well intended professional developers reality suggests that such an approach -- attractive though it may seem -- is idealistic as well as naive -- and as often as not, it produces disappointing results.

To base faculty development participation on volunteerism is to make

a number of dangerous assumptions. In the first place, it assumes faculty recognize a need to participate. Unfortunately, the feedback structure in many educational institutions is simply not sophisticated enough to cause many faculty members to conclude that current practices are deficient. Secondly, it assumes that faculty members are sufficiently motivated to seek avenues by which improvement might result. Furthermore, experience seems to suggest that those who participate voluntarily are often those who need the experience the least.

A disproportionate amount of professional development time and resources has been devoted toward causing participation to be viewed as desirable by target members of the faculty population. Interesting and varied techniques for creating faculty interest and for stimulating faculty motivation have been devised. On the more pragmatic level, faculty needs assessments have been conducted and development activities have been designed specific to the results of those assessments. And yet, battling tenure systems, faculty egos, and even lack of program credibility, those needing the help the most, continue to choose not to volunteer. The false assumption that professional educators as a whole are eager to take advantage of professional growth activities provided in their behalf has been a source of frustration which has caused the demise of enthusiasm for more than a few otherwise committed professional developers.

But the benefits that can be accrued from voluntary participation are significant. Simply stated, those who approach an experience with a positive attitude toward that experience are most likely to derive proportionally positive benefits from that experience. Few practitioners would seriously

debate this issue. Furthermore, valuable professional development time is not consumed during the activity itself in often futile efforts to counter negativeism toward the experience. In addition, an argument can be made that while participation may not be universal, the quality of that participation may very well be greater.

Mandatory Participation

Faced with frustration brought on by resistence to participate in faculty development opportunities, and pressures to serve the faculty as a whole, many professional developers have adopted a more direct though autocratic approach. Where permissible, policies have been implemented which mandate blanket participation by the entire or selected segments of a given faculty. The immediate result is obvious: uniform participation.

The problems are equally obvious. The human being does not customarily react positively to force and serious negative attitudes are often the product. Participation rates are predictibly higher, but the quality of participation becomes suspect. For the professional developer who views universal service to the faculty as a prime objective, operating within the parameters of a mandatory participation requirement is often viewed as acceptable.

Factors Affecting Participation

Undoubtedly, participation in a professional development program is influenced by a multitude of variables. Human behavior studies tell us that a person must recognize a need before effective participation can be expected. Psychology emphasizes the importance of the expectation expressed by those in authority. Approach -- avoidance theories say that one will

participate if that person perceives participation more rewarding than non-participation. Whatever the source, the prime motivator appears to be closely related to the elusive variable of attitude.

The effects of attitude on results have ceased to be debated years ago. Studies have consistently yielded a high correlation between the two. It can be hypothesized fairly accurately that the attitude a participant holds toward a professional development program will have a predictible effect on that participant's progress in the program. Likewise, studies consistently suggest that the attitude expressed by those in authority is equally predictive of one's attitude toward and subsequent progress in a professional development program.

All these suppositions are, however, predicated on the assumption that participants are able to exercise freedom of choice regarding their decision to participate. It can be further hypothesized that when faced with a mandatory participation requirement, attitude toward the program -- whatever its source, is negated as a participation -- controlling variable.

It was the purpose of this study to examine the effects of a mandatory participation requirement on participant attitude toward and subsequent progress in a professional development program.

PROCEDURE

By action of the Arkansas Board for Vocational and Technical Education on April 12, 1982, a massive professional development plan was set in motion. This plan involved the faculties of each of the 24 post secondary vocational-technical schools of the state, and included an attractive incentive program

for participation. Participation in the program was made mandatory for teachers hired after the program was implemented. Those hired prior to the board's action were exempt from this mandatory participation requirement, but were encouraged to participate on a voluntary basis. The incentives for participation remained the same for both groups. These two groups constituted the populations for this study.

Eight of the 24 schools in the Arkansas post-secondary vocational-technical school system were selected for this study. A 48-statement instrument was developed on which instructors and administrators of the eight schools expressed agreement or disagreement with each statement. A 5-point response scale was used on which a response of "1" indicated strong disagreement, and a response of "5" indicated strong agreement. Specific statements on the instrument were worded in such a manner that positive attitude toward the professional development program would, for some statements, necessitate a positive response of 4 or 5, while for other statements, a positive attitude would require a negative response of 1 or 2. A correction procedure was applied to each response to convert raw scores to indicators of attitude. This correction procedure was based on the nature of the statement -- positive or negative -- and the response actually made.

The instrument was completed by instructors and administrators alike in each of the eight schools constituting the sample. Survey return rate was 100%.

The professional development plan in effect in the Arkansas post secondary vocational-technical school system is based on the Performance-

Based Teacher Education (PBTE) curriculum developed by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education at Ohio State University. In the PBTE program, the various competencies shown to constitute the pedagogical responsibilities of a vocational-technical instructor are taught in some 125 self-instructional "modules". For the purpose of this study, progress was defined as the number of PBTE modules an instructor had completed. Progress data was obtained for the faculty of each of the eight schools in the study from the records of the state vocational-technical division's personnel office.

RESULTS

This study sought to examine the effects of a mandatory participation requirement on the attitude instructors expressed regarding professional development activities. Data were collected which would test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis Number 1 -

> The attitude toward a professional development program held by the administrators of a school has no affect on the attitude held by instructors of that school.

It has long been held that the attitude of a subordinate toward a program element is directly influenced by the attitude held by those in authority toward that same program element. Data from this study revealed, however, that in these eight schools, where for some instructors participation in professional development activities was mandatory, just the reverse effect existed -- that administrator attitude had no effect on, or,

in fact, had a negative influence upon instructor attitude toward that program. (See Table I)

TABLE I

ADMINISTRATOR ATTITUDE COMPARED WITH INSTRUCTOR ATTITUDE

Test	Variables	Result
t-Test for Sig. Dif.	Adm. Att./Inst. Att.	Sig. Difference (.01 level of prob.)
Pearson Product Moment Correlation	Adm. Att./Inst. Att.	Coef. = -.04
	Adm. Att./Mand. Inst. Att.	Coef. = -.33
	Adm. Att./Vol. Inst. Att.	Coef. = 0.00

Hypothesis Number 2 -

An instructor's attitude toward a professional development program has a significant effect on that instructor's progress in that program.

The attitude an instructor holds toward a professional development program was found to have a high degree of effect on that instructor's progress within the program, regardless of the means employed to assure participation. (See Table II).

TABLE II

INSTRUCTOR ATTITUDE COMPARED WITH INSTRUCTOR PROGRESS

Test	Variables	Result
Pearson Product Moment Correlation	Inst. Att./Inst. Prog.	Coef. = + .38
	Man. Inst. Att/Man. Inst. Prog.	Coef. = + .47
	Vol. Inst. Att/Vol. Inst. Prog.	Coef. = + .47

Hypothesis Number 3 -

The attitude toward a professional development program held by an instructor whose participation is required will not differ from the attitude held by an instructor whose participation is voluntary.

Those who oppose a mandatory participation often cite its supposed detrimental effect on participant attitude to support their argument. Logically speaking such a position seems to have merit. Data from this study, however did not support such a claim. In fact, no significant difference was found to exist between attitudes expressed by instructors whose participation was mandated, and attitudes expressed by instructors choosing to participate voluntarily. (See Table III)

TABLE III

ATTITUDES OF MANDATORY INSTRUCTORS VS ATTITUDES OF VOLUNTARY INSTRUCTORS

Test	Result
t-Test for Significant Difference	NSD (.05 level of prob.)

Hypothesis Number 4 -

The progress of an instructor whose participation in a professional development program is required will not differ from the progress of an instructor whose participation is voluntary.

Arguments in support of a mandatory participation requirement tend to lean more toward rate-of-participation -- that is, percentage of persons participating -- rather than toward total progress made. Data from this study

revealed that no difference existed between the progress of an instructor whose participation was required and that of an instructor whose participation was voluntary. (See Table IV). If one accepts that one's attitude influences one's progress, this would be an expected conclusion, since this study found a high correlation to exist between those two variables. (See Hypothesis II).

TABLE IV

PROGRESS OF MANDATORY INSTRUCTORS VS PROGRESS OF VOLUNTARY INSTRUCTORS

Test	Result
t-Test for Significant Difference	NSD (.05 Level of Probability)

CONCLUSIONS

Data from this study indicate that when faculty are required to participate in professional development activities, many of the variables usually credited with influencing participation cease to function. The mandatory requirement becomes the prime motivator, and takes precedence over other, more professionally acceptable means of motivating faulty behavior such as attitude demonstrated by superiors, incentives for participation, or professional commitment. While participation, however inspired, is dependent upon a positive attitude toward the program, that attitude does not appear to be threatened by a mandatory requirement to participate.

The purpose of a mandatory participation requirement is clear: to assure participation at all costs. While logic might suggest a corresponding deterioration of participant attitude and a subsequent reduction in participant progress, this study did not find such to be the case.

Persons participate in faculty development efforts for a variety of reasons. Those mandated to do so have no choice; those free to choose do so because of reasons unique unto themselves. In neither case does the reason appear to be influenced by the attitude expressed toward the program itself by those in authority, nor by the means chosen to acquire faculty participation.

In short, this study demonstrated that a mandatory requirement can be imposed upon a professional development program with no corresponding effects either on faculty attitude toward the program or on faculty progress within the program.